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Protectionist Fallacies Exposed

A Speech

By Dr. Michael Clark, M.P., at a Luncheon of The Free Trade League of Canada

Delivered in Manitoba Hall, Winnipeg, on April the Fourth, Nineteen-Sixteen

Protectionist Faliacies Exposed

Mr. D. W. Buchanan, president of the League, in introducing the speaker, described him as the most thoroughsoins free trader in the Canadian House of Commons.

Dr. Clark said: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, when I received a letter informing me that a body to be known by the ambitious title of the Free Trade League of Canada had been formed, you will not be surprised to know that I felt that at least I ought to be a member of it. After I read further in the letter and learned that I had been elected one of its honorary presidents, I can assure you that I felt that I was the recipient of a very distinguished honor.

I think it is of good augury for the League that I should have on my right at this luncheon a lady who comes from Manchester, and much as people may today laugh at what is called the Manchester school, believe me, ladies and gentlemen, that the doctrines of the Manchester school properly understood, are founded upon the doctrines of the New Testament, and, in the end, like all other truth, will prevail. So that if we are to have a Manchester school in this country, I repeat I don't know that we could have founded it under more happy auspices than in the presence of the lady on my right. And certainly there is no better place to found it than in the central metropolis of Canada that I have the honor of visiting today.

Now, I dare say some critics will think that we could have found a more opportune moment for the foundation of this league. Well, I demur to that view. I think the moment is opportune, and the people who talk most about a truce, after all, seem to think that the truce is a very good thing to be observed by the side of it that they don't belong to. That is so, I think, more or less, in the general field of politics both in this country and in the Old Country.

But certainly, on this trade question, there is no truce so far as our protectionist friends are concerned. On both sides of the Atlantic they are discussing, in press and on platform and in parliament, trade conditions as they are to exist after the war. When a protectionist comes to me and tells me that we must throw away our shibboleths, the shibboleth he is thinking of is my shibboleth. He wants me to throw away my shibboleth determined all the time to stick to his like grim death. That is the position, then, of most of those who tell us that this is not an opportune time to discuss things of a controversial nature.

At the very time they give me this friendly advice you have people in the Old Country who are talking in so many words of a policy of permanent economic hostility to our present enemies. I think the same idea has found expression both in the Canadian Parliament and in many of the newspapers of Canada, and is finding all too common expression, according to my view, in the ordinary walks of life, where men converse with one another. This idea of permanent economic hostility to our present enemies is being coupled with our old friend of mutual Imperial preference within the Empire and with the various portions of the Empire, and with it are now being coupled our present Allies.

Now you know that what I have said is accurate history as to what is going on on one side of the question. Well, it appears to me that when that kind of an argument is being put forward; when protectionists are realizing that protection needs the adventitious help of a spurious loyalty to help it out, I think it is most opportune that there should have been formed a Free Trade League of Canada to offset it. And let me say at this juncture that as a progressive form of thought a Free Trade League is a peculiarly happy organization.

Because if the tariff be a bad thing then all reformers ought to be members of the Free Trade League. Singletaxers, income-taxers, Labor men, fundamental reformers of all kinds, Socialists, ought to find themselves under this banner. Because until you have cleared the ground of the robbery and the rottenness which free traders believe rest upon the tariff, you cannot build up any of the other reforms in which their parties are interested. So I look at it. If you accept that view, then, however you may classify yourselves, I hope you will all be members of the Free Trade League of Canada and work amongst these classes to increase their appreciation of it.

Now I propose in the few minutes I intend to keep you to devote myself entirely to as non-contentious an examination of the proposition to which I have just referred, which is being put forward on both sides of the Atlantic, to as non-contentious an examination of that as is possible to a somewhat contentious man where fiscal matters are concerned.

Perhaps you will allow me to start out by saying that as regards a permanent economic hostile policy towards our enemies there are good grounds for thinking that it is morally indefensible. I don't think it is morally defensible and I am old-fashioned enough to believe that if you can prove a thing to be morally indefensible, you need not go much further in condemnation of it.

To get the right hang of this end of the question we want to ask ourselves: What is it we are fighting about, and whom it is we are fighting? Now, I don't think I could quote two authorities who ought to carry me further in Canada than the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Robert Borden, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. When these two gentlemen are in perfect agreement you can be nearly sure that they are nearly right. Because these two gentlemen have a tendency to deny everything that the other says. You can take my word for it if you haven't heard of it.

In the short war session Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, in the first speech referring to the war, that we were not fighting with the German people, and Sir Robert Borden, who followed him, hastened to dot his "i's" and stroke his "t's" and to repeat the same sentiment. Well, but if we are not fighting with the German people it would appear to me to be rather stupid, in the middle of the war, when people's thinking is perhaps not done with the greatest possible accuracy, to lay down the doctrine that you are going to fight them directly the war is over. It seems to me that such a doctrine is not logical and I think it is quite indefensible from an intellectual point of view.

What are we fighting? We are fighting a wrong system. With fighting a form of government. We are are fighting autocracy; we are fighting autocracy in people, who, in one sphere of their activities are militarists, but in another sphere of their activities are protectionists, because militarists and protectionists in Germany are the same people, bear in mind. So the argument of our friends just at this point is that after beating this system we are to take it up and imitate it in the British Empire. That is not a very defensible position as far as I can see. These new clothes in which protection flaunts itself don't commend themselves any more to me than the wretched old garments which were insufficient to cover its nakedness.

We are fighting militarism, but what are we looking for? Are we looking for an opportunity of imitating militarism; of picking up the very things which have led to this war? Surely not. Surely we are looking for a better time for the people of the world. Surely we are looking for a drawing closer together of the democracies of the world, looking away from the separate, narrow, nationalistic ideas to the brotherhood, to the internationalism of the race, and to a better state of affairs in the nearer approach of the millenium we long for. (Loud cheers).

It took some time to get you round that corner, but I see that most of you have arrived. (Laughter). Now that is our position as free traders from the moral point of view. I just want to touch on another point in a sentence. Perhaps the most despicable thing about protection in war time anyhow is its cowardice. I read again and again with delight that sentence in which Emerson, one of the greatest men of mark that this continent has produced, protests against the rank in-

justice done to the workman by cunningly devised tariffs, and he adds with manliness, "Let your work speak for you. Protection in its essence is a cowardly thing, and there is nothing morally grand about cowardice."

What is the source of the greatness of Britain from this point of view? It is the fact that Britain goes into the world with the watchword of "A Fair Field and no Favor," letting all come and strive who care to come and saying to them "We will win or take a beating every time." That is the language and the attitude of a strong man well set up on his limbs.

I sometimes tell them in the House of Commons that I wish the apple-growers of British Columbia and the manufacturers of Ontario would take a leaf out of the book of the grain growers of the plains and the cattle-raisers of Alberta. What is that leaf? Why, it is this: that we raise such fine wheat and such beautiful beef that we defy competition, let it come from where it may. That is the kind of man the world has got to beat and that is the kind of country one would be proud to inhabit.

So much for the moral aspect of the question and I have only time to touch on one aspect of it today. given you some grounds, some points, from which you can thin out this question along this moral aspect of it. The next thing I want to say about it is that the policy that I am referring to appears to me not only morally indefensible, but economically unsound, and the one follows the other, ladies and gentlemen. It follows the other just as surely as night does the day, because truth is a whole, and what is morally right will never be economically wrong. Never! What is morally right will be economically right, and what is morally wrong will be economically wrong.

View it from the narrowest standpoint, from the point I raised in connection with my previous argument.
Let me ask again: what are we fighting for and whom are we fighting. I
have already asked: what are we fighting for? Well, I answer that question by saying: we are fighting for a
better world, and I am optimistic
enough to believe that that will come.
But I think we are also fighting for
victory, are we not? There is no one

in Winnipeg, I am sure, who doubts that we are fighting for victory and hat we are sure to obtain it. We must obtain it because our cause is the right cause.

What is to follow victory, ladies and gentlemen? In conversation I have asked everyone who has put up the point of view I am combatting: when you have beaten the Germans are you going to get an indemnity and make them pay through the nose to Belgium and to France? Their reply is invariably in the affirmative, and then I ask them how they propose that Germany shall make her payments. In most cases that was something they hadn't thought of. They look at me for a minute and then ask me how will it be done? I tell them there is only one way in the world in which it can be done. I say: you don't propose that Belgium and France should take the payments of the indemnity in the shape of depreciated marks, for they would soon exhaust the marks of Germany?

Now it is the A.B.C. of economics that if an indemnity is to be paid to the winning country that indemnity must be paid in goods sent by the losing country. That is the A.B.C. of economics. You can be as sure of that as that you are in Winnipeg at the present moment.

When you find a man like Windermere writing and saying that some of the Allies have gone so far as to declare they will exclude imports from Germany altogether, then you can turn round and say to him: you don't propose to have an indemnity, because you cannot get it except in goods?

Don't you think that would be the best type of revenge: to keep the Germans working for you and for the Belgians and for the Frenchmen? I would suggest that plan, if it is not coming down from the very high moral stand I took a minute ago. After all, I don't think there is anything too bad, even morally considered, about making a nation that has put the world in such a turmoil as the German government has put our world, pay for it in that particular shape afterwards.

Now, if that settles the question of excluding imports altogether, I don't think I need dwell much longer upon this point; because if we are going to make the Germans pay an indemnity to Belgium and France—and I presume

we are going to make them pay a big one—that means that they will have to take lots of goods from Germany. Either we are going to let the Germans off that indemnity, or this idea of permanent economic hostility is economic nonsense.

I can illustrate that point by a fact quoted by the other side of the argument, tho the distinguished member of the House of Commons who quoted it and who shall be nameless, didn't know it. He showed how, after the Franco-German war France did less trade with England and more trade with Germany. Why did she do so? Because she lost the war and had to pay an indemnity to Germany. Economic necessity and economic truths, like all other facts, are stubborn things, or, as the poet Burns puts it, "Facts are chiels that winna ding, and daurna be disputed."

Well, now, I don't need to say any more upon the economic aspect of that question. I so on to look at the proposal of our opponents and I have a practical object in view in dealing with this proposal, because this is the proposal which will find itself in practical politics before many days are over. This is a proposal which free traders and which democrats, who are all believers in international brotherhood, will have to fight.

I have tried to show you that this proposal is economically unsound and morally indefensible. Now I pass on to show you how, in regard to the subject viewed from another angle, the peculiar angle of the British Empire, it is practically impossible of application. That third point would follow logically from the previous two, because if a man practices what is economically unsound and morally indefensible, he will find he is practicing something which costs him dear, even if it can be put into practice, which, in the case of nations, is impossible.

I don't know whether you recall that in 'he beginning of Mr. Chamberlain's agitation thirteen years ago he laid down this doctrine as axiomatic: That without a preference on food stuffs it would be impossible for Britain to give any preference to Canada at all. Well, to those of us who live on this side of the water I think that is obvious. There is no one here who expects Canada to do a large trade in textile goods to Lancashire, at least not in the immedi-

ate future. That would be a form of competition that we would be debarred from by the necessities of the case.

But if Canada cannot be helped in the export of foodstuffs she cannot be helped at all. Mr. Chamberlain laid that down as viomatic, and tho his successors propose it, there is not an economist of note in Britain who doesn't kno that that is so. Without a tax on foodstuffs Britain cannot give Canada a preference at all.

Now, I want to put to you this simple question: Do you think the condition of things in Britain a few years from now, when we are trying to reconstruct the world after the war, will be such that any responsible statesman—I don't care how he describes himself—would propose to tax the foodstuffs of Great Britain? The only way in which we can forecast the future at all is to look into the history of the past, and I think history has important guidance for us in trying to answer the question I have just put to you.

There were three great wars in the nineteenth century. There was the great French war ending in the victory of Waterloo. All of you who know the elements of English history remember that from 1818 to 1821 the condition of distress in Great Britain was past description of words. The distress culminated in the Luddite Riots of 1818, three years after the victory of Waterloo. But the people's suffering was terrible for six years after that victory, and indeed it gave rise to an agitation for cheaper food which never again subsided until the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.

Now that is an historic fact, which has a bearing on the question I am trying to answer, and I get it from the beginning of the nineteenth century. From 1854 to 1856 the Crimean War took place, and history relates that you had the riots in the cities of the Old Country which are specifically known as Bread Riots. It is well to remember in this connection that the wars may be thrust upon us—the we believe this war was a necessity past which we could not get—yet war is a terrible evil and brings with it terrible results.

In 1857 you had the Bread Riots and in 18f8 you had the people under John Ludd going about the streets of the Old Country calling for bread. But I



don't remember recorded in any history I ever read any statesman who proposed to relieve that condition of affairs by putting a tax upon foreign grain. The corn laws had been repealed eleven years previously to the Bread Biots of 1857 and they certainly were not reimposed at that date.

Now I come to the end of the nineteenth century, the Boer War. After the Boer War you had a very bad depression of trade in Britain. I will tell you a wonderful thing, which is worth mentioning at this point. At the end of the Boer War you had free trade in Britain for half a century and altho her people were nearly double what they were in the middle of the century, the trade depression was nothing like so great as it was after the Crimean or after the great French wars. And I heard Sir Edward Grey with my own ears say that while Britain had had depression of trade, those depressions had never been so great since she had had Free Trade. I give you that, for what it is worth, in passing.

I still want to get an answer to the question, which you haven't forgotten, I hope, and I want to recall to you that while there was that very bad depression of trade in Great Britain after the Boer War, and while one of the greatest electioneers of all history, Mr. Chamberlain, tried to revive the tariff in Great Britain, you know as well as I can tell you that in 1906, he, the great politician of the statesman order as he was, was finally defeated and was only able to count 156 in that general election of 1906 out of 670 members in the Brilsh House of Commons.

There was no question then of returning to taxing the food of the people. Now I come to the question which I put to you: Do you think there is any likelihood after this war that conditions will be such in Great Britain that any statesman will seriously propose to tax the food of the people? I leave that question, with such light as I have been able to shed over it for your guidance from the brief historical references my time has permitted me to make.

This question is such a big one that one doesn't know where to leave it. One of the curious things about this proposal is that people should propose to give a preference to Canada by taxing food-stuffs when the very people who would benefit by that, 'ccording to the presumptions of these half-taught economists, that is to say the farmers of the plains, don't want it, being manly enough to want to stand upon their own feet. They are manly enough to say: We would perish of hunger rather than have the British people, who have gone thru such a war as this, and have carried the burden of humanity and civilization, as we are carrying it, starve for our benefit. (Loud cheers).

If the farmers of the West don't want it, who does? Windermere (Loud laughter). The manufacturers of Ontario want it, and what do they want it for but to bolster up the protection upon their own goods? That is what they want it for; they want to bo able to say to the world: See what is come to Free Trade Britain, she is given up her effete policy of Free Trade, a policy, by the way, which enabled her to finance all the other nations at war. That was a marvellous performance for a country ruined by Free Trade.

That is the British end of it, but what is the Canadian end of it? I have just referred to the Ontario manufacturer as calling for a preference on Canadian wheat in the British market. Well, when they do that they laugh on one side of their face, but when they are asked to give a corresponding advantage to Canada, they laugh on the other side of it.

I have asked whether there is a British statesman who would put a duty on British food after the war. Now, I would like to ask another question: do you think there is a Canadian manufacturer who would be willing to lower his tariff protection for the benefit of Britain or of anybody else unless he was obliged to. I never saw one made that way yet. Well, if the statesmen of Britain refuse to tax the food of the people and the manufacturers here refuse to lower the tariff what is going to become of the proposition for a mutual preference? It is beginning to look a little thin as a practical proposition.

As a matter of fact it is a practical impossibility, because in the last analysis this isn't a thing between nations at all. Trade doesn't take place be-

tween nations. No imports or exports are entered upon the books of a nation, because trade takes place between the individuals of a nation. It does this in the case of a country and it does this also in the international law of trade.

In the last analysis, then, trade takes place between individuals, and there is something quite human in individuals which leads them to fight for freedom. They are fighting for it in Europe now. And this love of freedom is such that people who live on the borders of countries are continually free traders at night when the custom-house officer is not there. (Laughter). The tendency to trade is in their very blood.

In war time this tendency to run after freedom breaks out in another shape. Men are so fond of trading with one another that they continually run blockade during war time. It is the most difficult thing in the world to establish an effectual blockade beeause a man will trade at the risk of his life. He is doing it all the time. A man with a wife and children will risk his life every day for their sake, get-ting up early in the morning, working long hours and overcoming many difficulties. But he carries this risk to an extreme point when he runs a blockade. It is the love of trading which prompts him to do it. People are being prosecuted today in England for trading with Germany. I have no defence to offer of them. To trade with the enemy just now is an act of treachery to the flag, and I have no sympathy for these people when they get caught and are punished, but I mention the fact as a very striking evidence, surely, of this instinctive ten-dency of people to trade and to trade as freely as people will permit them to.

Let us bring it home to ourselves. Suppose after the war you have a different kind of blockade from that to which I have just referred. You know something about it out here in the West, where we often have heaps of grain lying on the prairie and no chance of getting it shipped. Suppose you are an individual farmer owning some of these heaps and needing money very badly. And suppose someone came along and said: Now I can buy that wheat from you. I can take it away and I can give you greenbacks for it, but I am sorry to say it is going to

Germany. Well, I know what everyone of you would say. You would say:
It can go to Timbuctoo for all I care.
I don't care how pious you may look
that is exactly what you would do.
And if the farmer needed the money he
wouldn't be sane if he didn't take it.

Let me take another concrete example from inside Canada. Before the war we were selling to Germany con-siderable quantities of tin clippings from British Columbia. The people came by them honestly for they have a salmon-canning industry there and in making the cans for the salmon they cut the clippings off. Now these clippings were sold to Germany. The Germans have some good points, you know. For one thing they are frugal and I was brought up near enough to the borders of Scotland to have a regard for frugality. I don't feel disposed to blame them for it and if they practice it again after the war what harm will there be in it?

Being of a curious frame of mind I tried to think out what the Germans did with these tin clippings. I was pretty sure I had hit upon it, and upon inquiry I found I was right. They made toys of them. Now, suppose you had a heap of tin clippings and couldn't get rid of them. And then suppose a man came along with the greenbacks. Would you sell the clippings to Germany? Certainly you would. Oh, yes, to sell is all right from the protectionist's standpoint. The only condition he makes is that you shall not buy the German's toys.

But that is an economic impossi-bility, because in foreign trade you have to buy as well as to sell. There are just two sides to foreign tradeimporting and exporting. If you don't import yor cannot export. There was a time on these prairies when the Red Men lived in their tepees, catching a sittle fish or a little venison and sharing it with their wives and children. They did the same thing day after day. That was their life. There was no foreign trade then. It was Canada for the Canadians then. (Loud laughter). And the home market for the home producer. (Renewed laughter).

Well, now am I to be told by a reasonable man looking at this practical side of the question, that if one of my grandchildren came round my knees four years hence—when, please God,

this war will be in process of being forgotten—and asks me for one of the German toys we used to have in the old days; will any reasonable man tell me that I must say to that child—no, you must get an extra feed of spagnetti because the Italians were our Allies? (Loud laughter). Ec nomically indefensible, morally unscund and practically inapplicable!

There was a significant word dropped the other day by one of our greatest statesmen on this subject. He spoke what we all feel and believe to be true when he said that the business of the moment was the war, but he went on to add that when we do come to talk of trading after the war we must eliminate all ideas of vindictiveness and we must look after the millions of people in our own country.

I want to leave these thoughts with you as a fitting summary of the arguments which I have tried briefly to bring before you — elimina's all thoughts of vindictiveness and look after the millions of your own country. And to my own thinking we can have no better model for after-the-war construction in Canada than that of looking after the best interests of Canada. V. hether we want to do it or not, ladies and gentlemen, we shall have to do it, not in a narrow or selfish sense, but we shall have to face our obligations,

which will be great. We shall have to pay the interest on our debt; we shall have to reconstruct our industries and we shall have to build again the way of this Canada of ours. And I think Loyd George's motto for Britain is also a fitting motto for Canada. It is the spirit of those words of Shakespeare, altho they are hackneyed words:—

"This above all—to thine own self be true;

"And it must follow as the night the

day, "Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

If you look after the best interests of Canada you will look after the best interests of the Empire, and you will look after the best interests of the whole world. It is as sure as we sit here that these interests will need looking after. We are being committed to tremendous financial as well as human obligations in this war, and it will only be by developing to the ufter-nost our wonderful resources in Canada that we can tackle these interests and by tackling them fearlessly build up again our own prosperity and take that place that we are worthy to take in the great Commonwealth of free nations to which we are all proud to belong—the British Empire. (Loud and prolonged applause).

Free Trade Publications

Protection or Free Trade—By Henry George. 40 cents. Paper edition 10 cents.

The Hungry Forties: Description of life under Protection in Great Britain. Paper edition 10 cents.

Natural Taxation—By Thos. S. Shearman. A concise and brief examination of Customs, Excise, Internal, Land Value, General Property and other forms of taxation. 40 cents.

Sixty Years of Protection in Canada— Edward Porritt. Price \$1.25.

The Tariff: What It is, How it Works, Whom it Benefits—By Lyberger. Price \$1.50.

How Britain Won Free Trade—J. A. Stevenson. Price 10 cents.

A Modern Goliath. Price 5 cents.

The Tariff and the Trusts Franklin Pierce. Price 65 cents.

